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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000711

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FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR U/S BURNS, EUR A/S FRIED, EUR PDAS
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NSC FOR ANSLEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV PBTS YI SR

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S 5/21 MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT TADIC
AND FM JEREMIC

Classified By: Ambassador Michael C. Polt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) I met with President Tadic on May 21, our first meeting since Serbia's parties agreed on a new government. Tadic, joined by new Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, said he was weary after "so many problems" involved in the last minute government negotiations and claimed victory for avoiding the "disaster scenario" of Radicals winning new elections. The President also claimed "pressures from all sides" to form a coalition, and said that he began receiving congratulatory calls from "foreign leaders" for making a deal even before it was official. He thought Prime Minister Kostunica's support for Radical Tomislav Nikolic as Speaker had backfired (he cited internal polls which showed DSS support down and the SRS up) and that Nikolic's inflammatory statements while Speaker showed the danger posed by the Radicals clearer than ever before to the people of Serbia.

¶2. (C) On the way forward, I gave him three direct messages:

-- things will get worse for Serbia if a new UNSC resolution fails;

-- give us a reason to justify certification (I passed him our 11 points for action on ICTY);

-- as the largest stakeholder in the new government, Tadic is now responsible for the GOS' next moves on Kosovo and ICTY.

¶3. (C) Tadic wanted to talk mostly about Kosovo and lamented Serbia's lack of diplomatic "maneuvering room" on the issue. He also retreated from any accountability on Kosovo, preferring to frame Kosovo as a "useful tool" exploited by both the USG and Russia for geopolitical reasons. Nevertheless, Tadic claimed, only Serbia and European countries -- not the US and Russia -- had much to lose if things went poorly in Kosovo. I was pointed in my correction of his statement: we have U.S. troops in harm's way in Kosovo, which makes the issue of tremendous importance to us.

I told Tadic that the USG will not deviate from supporting Kosovo independence and that further delay would endanger Kosovo and regional stability. I suggested that Tadic and GOS should consider boiling down the Serbian objection to Kosovo independence to a simple statement of "will neither accept nor recognize" without going further (i.e. calling for new negotiations, more delays, etc.), if they were really interested in helping themselves and their Russian friends out of their current Kosovo dilemma.

¶4. (C) The President had many more questions than answers on Kosovo, wanting to know about the Secretary's trip to Moscow and a resolution timetable in the UN. He repeatedly tried to sound me out as to the possibility of U.S. recognition of Kosovo in the event a UNSC resolution failed. Jeremic was particularly worried with the possibility of the USG forcing a showdown vote in the UNSC prior to the end of our presidency in the Council, pleading that we not "play hardball" with Russia on Kosovo. Such a move, Jeremic added, would "break Serbia's back." I was not shy in pointing out to Tadic that Kosovo was far from the main issue we had to resolve in our relationship with the Russians and reminded him that to the extent Kosovo was a point of contention between us and the Russians it was because Serbia had put it there.

¶5. (C) Tadic and Jeremic rolled out tired Serbian arguments on Kosovo -- lamenting a "biased" UNOSEEK process, claims that Kosovo Albanian "extremists" could be contained (by us) indefinitely, and that the GOS call for more talks was a "gentle" request. I told him that Serbia had had the chance to argue for its interests through the UNOSEEK process and had failed to do so effectively. Instead, Serbia chose to tolerate other actions such as Artemije obstructing church reconstruction, thuggish behavior from northern Kosovo Serbs opposing returns and general attacks and misrepresentations of the Ahtisaari plan.

¶6. (C) In a brief discussion on ICTY, during which I handed to the President our 11 points for some real action, I reminded him that the Secretary's certification decision would be due on Capitol Hill soon and Serbia needed to give her a reason to justify certification.

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¶7. (C) Interestingly, Jeremic said that the Russians had been telling him that they sought a face-saving outcome on Kosovo. They want to demonstrate that the U.S. cannot simply run roughshod over Russia, Jeremic claimed. In this context, Moscow was encouraging the GOS to stick to its call for additional talks on Kosovo, arguing that this would give Russia the out it needed. The Ambassador reminded Tadic and Jeremic of all the sops already granted to Russia, including over a year of negotiations, an elephant round, and the UNSC mission to Belgrade and Pristina.

¶8. (C) In a brief courtesy call just with Jeremic later in the day, the new Foreign Minister averred he will do "everything in (his) power" to keep US-Serbia relations productive and in line with "the President's vision of Euro-Atlantic integration." Specifically citing our military relationship as "the most fertile ground," Jeremic assured me that his Ministry would follow up immediately on its PfP presentation document, as well as sending a diplomatic note to the Finance Ministry to release USG funds for WMD destruction. Jeremic said that Kostunica had agreed, during government formation talks, not to block any defense or other reforms needed for NATO integration. Jeremic stressed Serbia's regional role and noted that he will make Sarajevo his first bilateral trip as FM. He hoped that the new Cabinet will agree on a Srebrenica declaration before the July anniversary. Jeremic noted that his (and Tadic's) desired language for the text, unlike the PM's, would admit Serbian guilt for the massacre, and left open the compromise of having two GOS statements.

POLT